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ABSTRACT

Ten suggestions that can help the elementary school teacher expand and enhance the basal reading program are (1) collect additional material on the authors, genres, and art media found in the series; (2) supplement the program with audiovisual and human, as well as printed, resources; (3) meet with other staff members to plan the curriculum; (4) be flexible enough to adapt if a blown projector bulb threatens the lesson plan; (5) adjust the basal program to the class' needs; (6) find new ways to approach old ideas: (7) involve students in the program by, for example, permitting them a choice of activities; (8) incorporate writing, listening, and oral language, in addition to reading, into the curriculum; (9) keep a camera or videotape machine handy to record the class' progress--a PTA slide show of their children's involvement in the reading program can encourage the parents' support; and (10) read to the class daily. Students will develop the habit of reading only if they see it as both fun and worthwhile. (MMM)

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EXTENDING THE BASAL READING PROGRAM

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EXTENDING THE BASAL READING PROGRAM

It is established fact that the basal reading program is the vehicle through which reading is taught in the majority of schools in the United States. Though it is difficult to deny the efficiency of this approach as a means for assuring a sequential and organized plan for introducing skills to large numbers of children, it is possible to question the basal approach to reading as the most efficacious way to produce readers. That is, readers in the sense of those who choose to read.

A pilot program was developed and implemented in second and fifth grades to extend the basal reading program and involve a variety of materials and reading experiences. The program was so successful it is being expanded this year. Inherent in the program is the idea that reading encompasses a great assortment of activities and that the library/media center is part of the reading program.

The following is the process that was used to organize the program and some specific activities that were enjoyed.

1. Develop a collection of materials and resources that enhance your reading program.

The basal program that is adopted by your school or system should be carefully analyzed level by level. This can be done over a period of time in in-service meetings organized on a grade level basis.

The analysis consists of a study of each story, poem and informational piece in the basal and decisions made as to ways to extend each of these. For example, if there are poems by authors such as Myra Cohn Livingston and Karla Kuskin, you might suggest ordering books of poetry by these writers. The original stories from which basal selections have been adapted should be available in the library. It would be advisable to get a classroom set of original books for one selection per level to encourage a lesson in critical reading by comparing the original and the adaptation. Additional books by authors of the selections in the basal should be available. Books that expand a genre such as folktales, or an art medium such as woodcuts, are also good selections. Informational selections can be related to additional informational books or to fiction.

It is probable that you will need far more materials than can be purchased in one year. The basal is in adoption for a long period of time and this program can be developed and implemented gradually. This gradual process will also allow you to incorporate new ideas each year as a bonus for you.

2. Consider various types of resources: print, audio-visual and human.

Books have been suggested, but there are numerous devices to entice students to read that should also be considered. Non-print materials including films, filmstrips, audiotapes and videotapes are excellent supplements to the reading program. An audio-visual medium that allows students to meet an author, or hear that author

read his/her works, or brings an expert on a subject into the classroom is invaluable for arousing interest in reading. Non-print interpretations of books can also provide a stimulus for reading.

Human resources are often overlooked. In any community there are numerous people who would be delighted to be invited to a school to share their ideas or hobbies or travel experiences. Someone who has traveled to Scotland and visited the home of Robert Louis Stevenson could share that experience. Someone who collects Native American artifacts could provide an exhibit and explain the cultural differences among tribes. Professionals whose work relates to a basal selection could be invited to work with students. For example, a basal biography of Louis Braille might generate a study of braille and a visit by a doctor or someone familiar with devices available today for the blind. Videotaping visitors provides a storehouse of materials for future years.

The possibilities for expansion are limited only by your imagination and will be enhanced by using group brainstorming techniques. One idea triggers another and you will soon have a variety of ideas to select from.

3. Plan your program and maintain planning sessions on a regular and periodic basis.

Initial planning is essential and should include grade level teachers, library/media specialists, the principal and others who are involved in curriculum development. Continued meetings are also essential to stimulate new ideas and to provide motivation and support for group members. We all get bogged down occasionally and need the

reinforcement that interaction with colleagues can provide.

It is also necessary to maintain a close contact with your library/media specialist. Provide this person with enough advance notice of your material needs so they will be available when you wish to use them. A joint knowledge of the program will also enable the librarian to be alert to new materials that can be included in your basal program.

4. Be flexible.

Planning has been done. You are all set to show a specific film or use a certain set of books and you discover that the bulb is blown with no replacement or someone else checked out the books ahead of you. Don't fall back on the time-worn "I knew this wouldn't work. I'm going to stick to the teacher's manual from now on!"

If enough ideas have been generated, there should be alternative possibilities for you to follow. Or, you might have to skip something you had planned to do - but the next lesson goes beautifully. Realize that there are flaws in any system and relax.

It is also possible to skip a story and come back to it, or to jump ahead one, if that is necessary. Which brings us to -

5. Remember that the basal is a tool, not a set of commandments.

The basal is to be used flexibly by you to the best advantage of learning by your students. There is more review and maintenance of skills built into any basal than most students will need. You must learn what to delete so you can incorporate some <u>reading</u> activities.

6. Be spontaneous.

You must be spontaneous enough to continuously add new ideas to your teaching or to devise new ways of approaching an old idea. If this approach to reading becomes as set in concrete as the basal manual, boredom will occur. Teaching should be as exciting for the teacher as for the students.

7. Involve students in the program.

Student involvement in reading is usually limited to who gets to pass out and collect the books for reading time. The approach suggested here can involve students in many activities. If a reading table in your classroom becomes a regular part of the reading program, then students can take responsibility for selecting and exchanging the books on a regular basis. Even young children can accept this responsibility.

If your next basal selection was on bears, students could choose a variety of fiction and non-fiction books on many reading levels for free reading. This might include Paddington Bear, Winnie-the-Pooh, The Biggest Bear, Blackboard Bear, Pandas, Angela and Bear, Bearymore, The Bear Who Wanted to Be a Bear, and Good as New.

Students could also be given a choice as to the way you will extend the basal selection. Present them with the possibilities and allow them to make choices.

8. Involve all the language arts.

Reading is a communication skill and should be related to other communication skills. Writing, listening and oral language development are a complement to reading.

Interest in a particular author might stimulate some students to write a personal letter to the author. Other students might choose to write to a publisher to see if it is possible to obtain biographies, bibliographies, posters, bookmarks, etc. by and about an author.

Some publishers sponsor a "Dial-an-Author" program where students can interview an author. Careful planning for this interview can incorporate many reading skills.

A class book of stories about a topic found in the basal can be fun to complete. Individual stories about your favorite dragon, or bear can be collected and bound to be made available for classroom reading. The teacher should participate in this writing to provide a model.

Plays should be performed and not just read. An exhortation to "read it the way you'd say it" is not the same as actually performing the play. Props should be kept at a minimum, as the reading activity is what you are emphasizing.

9. Keep a camera and/or videotape handy.

A photographic record of your year's involvement in reading is invaluable for personal satisfaction and for good public relations. Parents love to see what their children have been doing in school and we can promise you a greater turn-out at parent-teacher meetings when parents know they are going to see slides or video-tapes of their children.

Parents also have a greater understanding of the extent and complexity of the reading program when they can see a photographic record of a year's program. Take advantage of this to develop

good public relations.

10. Read to your students every day.

If we are ever going to convince students that reading is worthwhile and fun, we must take the time to share reading with them. There is no more important activity in your school day than the time you spend reading to your students. This should be done at all grade levels.

SUMMARY

Ten activities for enhancing and expanding a basal approach to reading have been suggested. It is implied that this will be done on a school or system-wide basis. If you can not convince your system or school that this is feasible, then develop the program yourself.

Get together with the librarian and follow the suggestions that have been made here. The payoff will be your own personal satisfaction, your increased interest in teaching, the involvement of your students, and possibly even higher test scores.